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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000140

SIPDIS

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FOR EUR/ERA AND WHA/CCA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [CU](#) [LO](#)

SUBJECT: SLOVAK MPS VISIT CUBAN DISSIDENTS, BRING MONEY AND MEDICINE

REF: A. 06 BRATISLAVA 647

[¶](#)B. BRATISLAVA 31

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).).

[¶](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Two opposition MPs traveled to Cuba recently to meet with dissidents and bring them money and medicine. They, along with Pontis Foundation, the NGO that organized the trip, hope to raise awareness of human and civil rights abuses in Cuba and to increase support for Cuban dissidents. Pontis is attempting to organize a similar trip to Cuba for a governing Smer MP in June, in part to preclude a coalition-opposition polarization of Cuba in Slovakia. The Slovak MFA, which doubts the ability of the EU to come to consensus on a unified Cuba strategy, recently turned down a request by the Cuban Foreign Minister to meet with the Slovak MFA State Secretary (Deputy Foreign Minister). Meanwhile, the new Cuban Ambassador to Slovakia appears to have established good connections here. Post is planning several outreach events on the topic of Cuba. END SUMMARY.

MPs COMPARE CUBA TO 1950s CZECHOSLOVAKIA

[¶](#)2. (U) At a press conference on 2/26, two opposition MPs announced that they had recently traveled to Cuba to meet with five or six dissidents, including 2002 Sakharov prize winner Oswaldo Paya, and give them money and medicines. Daniel Lipsic, former Justice Minister from the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), and Martin Fedor, former Minister of Defense from the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU), took separate trips on tourist visas to Cuba in the past two months. They compared the current lack of human and civil rights in Cuba to 1950s Czechoslovak communism and Cuban prisons to concentration camps. Lipsic proposed the creation of lists of Cuban judges and prosecutors who impose draconian prison sentences on dissidents for eventual use by a post-transition democratic Cuba in whatever type of national memory or reconciliation method the country implements. He wants to send letters to those judges and prosecutors now to declare their personal responsibility and thereby preclude a future defense of merely following orders from above. Lipsic also thanked the Slovak Embassy in Havana, noting its continuing efforts to help dissidents there (ref A). In response to a question about Prime Minister Robert Fico's attendance at the Cuban National Day in Bratislava in January (ref B), Lipsic urged Fico to travel to Cuba to see the situation for himself.

[¶](#)3. (U) The MPs' trips were organized by Pontis Foundation, a Slovak NGO involved in democracy promotion, and an unnamed Swedish NGO. At the press conference, Pontis also thanked Deputy Prime Minister Dusan Caplovic for sending a letter to

the Cuban Ambassador to Slovakia requesting the release of jailed and ailing Cuban dissident Francisco Chaviano Gonzales, whom Pontis "adopted" in 2004.

¶14. (U) The MPs traveled on tourist passports with tourist visas. They cited two incidents of being watched by Cuban authorities while there. Fedor, who was traveling with a Swedish MP, was stopped by immigration upon entering Cuba and asked for his diplomatic passport. Lipsic noted that the same cab driver picked him up every time he needed a cab over a period of four days.

¶15. (C) In an attempt to avoid domestic political polarization about Cuba, Pontis hopes to send an MP or MEP from Smer, the party of the Prime Minister, to Cuba in June. Smer has indicated it is willing to participate, but no definitive plans have yet been made.

MFA SAYS NO TO CUBAN FM; DOUBTS EU CONSENSUS ON CUBA

¶16. (C) The MFA Cuba desk officer, Zdenek Rozhold, who previously spent three years at the Slovak Embassy in Havana, said that neither of the two opposition MPs had informed the government or the MFA beforehand about their trip. He knew of no plans for a Smer MP to go to Cuba.

¶17. (C) Rozhold, who worked in the MFA's European affairs section in between his assignment in Havana and manning the Cuba desk, reiterated that the GOS's policy towards Cuba has not changed (ref B). MFA State Secretary (equivalent to a Deputy Minister) Diana Strofova turned down a request to meet Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque at a human rights meeting in Geneva. Rozhold believes this will delay the

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signing of an economic cooperation agreement between the two countries and a potential trip by Ministry of Economy officials to Cuba. Rozhold made clear that such a visit, if it occurs, would not be at the ministerial level. The GOS has previously explained that the purpose of an economic agreement would be to establish a framework to discuss Cuba's debt to Slovakia (ref A). That debt is roughly SKK 2.9 billion (USD 111 million), but the conversion rate of the 1980s-era Cuban peso would be the first step in negotiating the debt repayment.

¶18. (C) Rozhold was pessimistic about the EU's ability to come to consensus on a unified EU strategy for Cuba. He thought it even less likely that there could be a joint U.S.-EU statement on Cuba.

NEW CUBAN AMBASSADOR HAS FRIENDS ACROSS SLOVAKIA

¶19. (C) A Pontis employee believes that the new Cuban Ambassador to Slovakia, David Paulovich Escalona, who previously served in Prague, has better contacts in the country than his predecessor. The Pontis organizer noted, for example, that the Swedish MP traveling with Fedor was not stopped by Cuban immigration. Since Escalona's arrival (he was accredited in November), a new branch of the "Society of Friends of Cuba in Slovakia" opened in Kosice, Slovakia's second largest city, where the Cuban Ambassador met with the mayor in January. The club claims 600 members and six branches across the country. The Pontis rep pointed out that it was in Kosice that its Cuban posters - and only the Cuban posters - from an exhibition about political prisoners around the world were destroyed "accidentally" by an outsourced agency last fall (September-October timeframe).

¶10. (SBU) Pontis has a regular heckler at their press conferences. He tends to ask accusatory questions along the lines of: "Aren't you just an American mouthpiece, influenced

by American agencies?" Pontis does not know his name or current employer, but he previously worked for the now-defunct journal of the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), Vladimir Meciar's party which is currently a junior partner in the governing coalition. The heckler has appeared at non-Pontis and non-Cuba events, as well. According to a Pontis employee, other reporters have confronted the heckler and asked him to limit his questions.

UPCOMING EMBASSY EFFORTS

¶11. (SBU) To commemorate the 4th anniversary of the Cuban crackdown on 75 peaceful dissidents, the Embassy is contributing an exhibition of 10 posters portraying the lives of jailed Cuban dissidents to a public event hosted by Pontis on March 16. The Ambassador will attend the event.

¶12. (C) Post, in cooperation with USINT Havana, is in the planning stages for a DVC between Slovaks from government and NGOs and Cuban dissidents. The Ambassador intends to host either a pre- or post-conference discussion on Cuba timed around the late April "Democracy in Cuba" Berlin conference organized by the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba.

VALLEE